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ABSTRACT

Socialization strategies for black children should be designed to prepare them to function in a competent, comfortable, and culturally secure manner; there may be a need to reevaluate the ability of those advocates currently responsible for the welfare of black children. Strategies of socialization should be based upon the philosophy of Afrocentrism, the Kawaida Theory, and education for self-reliance. Advocacy and change agent orientation need to be the behavior modes of socialization agents. The objectives of socialization must reflect a systematic approach to the concept of nation building, and a committment to the transmission, clarification, and reinforcement of values that promote a positive identity for black children in a cultural context. (Author/JCD)

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Socializing the Black Child to Cope in the 1980's

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Abstract

Socializing the Black Child to Cope in the 1980's

The socialization strategies necessary for useage with Black children should be designed to prepare them to function in a competent, comfortable, culturally secure manner. Those who affect the development of Black children may need to re-evaluate their own philosophy and behavior to ascertain whether or not they are capable of functioning as change agents and advocates for Black children. All of the components of the environment of Black children impact them simultaneously, often in a manner that impedes their positive growth and development. Thus, it is essential to the survival of Black children that they develop coping strategies consistent with their cultural reality.

Socializing Black Children to Cope in the 1980's

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The educational system of this country is, in short, designed to destroy the Black child. It does not matter whether it destroys him by stoning him in the ghetto or by driving him mad in the isolation of Harvard. And whoever has survived this crucible is a witness to the power of the Republic's educational system. (Baldwin, 1980, p. 45)

Black children and their families exist in a world society that is corrupt, unstable and fraught with value conflicts and cultural clash. This state of affairs is not one that has just developed, but, rather, has been in existance for a long time. The conditions that Black people in America have had to adjust to were not what they initiated but were imposed upon them. Black families are the victims of society, but in so many ways are being blamed for their victimization. It is because of this syndrome of blaming the victim that Black child advocates will need to re-examine the strategies being utilized in behalf of Black children.

According to the 1980 Status Report of the National Black Child Institute, Black families and their children are an at risk population, with a quality of life that can interfere with the positive growth and development of Black children.

> 42% of all Black children live in poverty. This represents the overall condition of a significant number of Black children. We think that this statistic in 1980 is disgraceful. In addition to poverty the wel-

fare system often requires that families separate in order to become eligible for benefits. Thus 44% of all Black children live in families headed by single mothers. In two-parent families, 60% of all wives work and in 1979, 63% of all children under 18 were in the labor force. Secondly, in education, Black children who now comprise 46% of all students to be labled and tracked as "educable Mentally retarded" rather than the preferential treatment given when a child is diagnosed as having "special learning disabilities." During Florida's first year of competency testing, only 23% of its Black students passed the math exam, as compared to 76% of the white students. In New York, the dropout rate has reached 45%.

Finally, in child welfare, 40% of the 500,000 children estimated to live in foster homes are Black. (BCDI, 1980) According to a recent California state health plan report, Black babies are 74% more likely than white babies to die before they're a year old and the differnce widened during the last decade. (San Diego Tribune, April 18, 1981)

Black families in America are being impacted by all the areas of their environment. The impact upon them, though certainly present in other segments of society, is not reflected in the context of racism as it is in Black America. The context of existance and the quality of life is not of the same dimension as envisioned by our forebears. What they suffered for, it seems, only served to provide a population that continues to suffer the humiliation of second-class citizenship and deficit labeling. Unfortuntely, far too many policy makers still ascribe to the "Tangle of Pathology" (Moynihan, 1965) as an appropriate descriptive of the Black family system. Such a pre-

mise, does not take into consideration the structure of the environment that Black families function in.

Phyllis Ross (1973) clearly states the conditions under which Black parents have to engage in the role of parenting:

> It is with great respect that we talk to Black parents about raising children. They have to raise their children under the most horrendous circumstances. In social, economic, and emotional deprivation. Educational deprivation, too. The quality of Black life, while it is improving, has been unspeakable. And not because of anything Blacks have done. Because of what has been done to Blacks.. no other group has had the experience of being treated as less than human for generation after generation. (Ross and Wyden, 1973, pps. XX-XXI)

One can clearly see that the challenge before Black parents and significant others in Black child development is that of reorganizing the Black child's reality. Banks and Grambs (1972) indicate that in spite of social movements of the past, the social reality of Black children is defined by inappropriate others. The Black poetess, Margeret Bourroughs articulated this reality when she wrote,

> What shall I tell my children who are Black of what it means to be captive in this dark skin? Of how beautiful they are when everywhere they turn they are faced with abhorence of everything that is black.

Storm clouds black, black is evil.
And evil is black and devils food is black. (cited in Banks and Grambs, 1972)

When one analyzes the various data sources regarding the state of the Black race, one can come to the conclusion that Black families are:

Struggling in a racist society which limits access to the proper education, health and job opportunities. Struggling in a society that has standards (values) that are often in conflict with the values of the Black domestic unit.
Struggling in a society that views Black parents as not being capable of effective parenting,
Struggling in a society that offers inaccurate and inappropriate images to the Black child and family.
Strugging in a society that does not provide the quality of support systems necessary for Black children and their families.
Struggling in a society that offers 'authorities' to challenge the role of Black parents.
Struggling in a society that structures institutions to further alienate the Black domestic unit that must consume their services.
Struggling in a society that is unstable and does not offer stability to the Black domestic unit. (Thomas, 1979)

Those who choose to function as Black child advocates, will need a network that will provide strategies for change. Tucker (1978) indicates that the change agent engages in planned intervention and that all change agent actions should be based upon rational decision making. This implies a systematic approach is necessary to address the needs of Black children, with the

initial stages occuring within the Black family system. Tucker further suggests that action on a massive scale cannot effectively occur without the long-term effects of small group action.

Advocacy, Change Agentry and the Socialization Process

The Black child is the center of a system that is comprised of the family, significant others, the cultural community, the larger community and outer society. These components each have within them, standards, structures and processes. It is necessary for those in each of these areas around the child to attempt to come together in behalf of the child. In order for this to occur, advocates will need to have an accurate understanding of the nature and structure of all the components around the child. It is important to utilize information sources from the Black experience as both the primary sources as well as the tools for interpretation of non-Black sources. Hill (1975) illustrates this in his research regarding the structure of the Black family, where he based his research on a premise derived from an accurate analysis of the Black experience, interpreted the same data used by non-Black researchers, and arrived at a significantly different conclusion. In essence, Hill introduced the concept of strength as a basis for analyzing the Black family system. He suggests in his research that the nature and structure of the Black family system evolved from the presence of five basic strengths that were utilized to function in and survive in America. The implications of his research are that those who choose to act in behalf of Black children should consider developing paradigms based upon those strengths.

Nyerere (1973) indicates the important role that education plays in the socialization process, and how crucial it is for advocates to understand that,

> Our people...must organize themselves co-operatively and

> work for themselves through working for the community of which they are members...This is what our educational system has to encourage. It has to foster the social goals of living together, working together, for the common good. It has to prepare our young people to play a dynamic and constructive part in the development of a society in which all members share fairly in the good or bad fortune of the group, and in which progress is measured in terms of human well being... Our education must therefore inculcate a sense of commitment to the total community, and help children to accept the values appropriate to our kind of future, not those appropriate to our colonial past. (Nyerere, 1973, p. 5)

The challenge that is offered by Nyerere is one of socializing Black children to be self-reliant individuals, with a thorough understanding of their environment, and the dynamics within it. He is instructing those who advocate, to take the responsibility for socializing the children within the frame of truth and responsibility. This point of view is consistent with the nature of the Black experience. As Ross (1973) pointed out, the role of parenting for Black people has a different dimension than in other segments of society.

The mood of society has shifted in what Gill (1980) defines as the "meanness mania"; he indicates that the mood is shifting to a more negative context than positive. Individuals who represent populations that are perceived as the cause of the current social conditions rather than the victims are being maligned. He utilizes history as the background to analyze the shift of focus on the part of society from Blacks to themselves.

> In the 1960s the federal government and the larger society made commitments to better the conditions of im-

> poverished Americans and to strive to eliminate the formal and informal barriers to racial equality. Now, less than twenty years later, there has arisen a changed mood and attitude towards such programs and strategies. Instead of compassion, one witnesses hostility towards efforts to reduce economic inequities and to overcome the effects of past and present discrimination. Instead of appeals to achieve equal educational opportunity and economic opportunities, one hears code words like "forced busing", "white flight", and "reverse discrimination." These code words are mainfestations of a spreading mania within American society, a mania increasingly adament against governmental and societal efforts to help Blacks...and the poor. (Gill, 1980, p. 1)

Gill's remarks indicate another reality that the advocate-change agent will have to address in the socialization of Black children; the attitude of dislike that manifests itself in the Black child's environment, towards the Black child, simply because the child is Black. This attitude affects expectation, motivation and performance, and implies to the child that the culture of the child is deficit. This deficit connotation applied to the culture of the child, then, introduces another area that the socialization process will have to address: the validity of the culture of the child and how that culture can be effectively utilized to socialize the child. What is being suggested here, is to utilize all the components of culture as socialization tools for Black children.

Jackson (1968) states that the culture of the child is the core of the identity of the child, and the cultural community is a part of that core. This is consistent with Madhubuti's (1973) notion that people possessing a common language can utilize that language to its highest degree given direction and purpose through culture. The advocate then, must re-examine the cultural community institutions, to ascertain whether these institutions are (1) still functional, (2) structured to meet the needs of the cultural population, (3) utilized appropriately by the population.

The concern here is, whether the traditional Black institutions still exist in the cultural community, and if not, how they can be re-activated to assist in the socialization of Black children. Asante (1980) further contends that the philosophy of Afro-centricity can be a regenerative process that can be utilized to socialize African Americans, giving them a truer sense of self based upon their history and experience. He suggests that it is through a communal effort that this concept can come alive. Through the common thrust of purpose, the institutions can re-organize themselves in behalf of Black children and their families, to provide vehicles for fostering the development of a collective consciousness.

> My case is that whites have never had to react to us as a people with a history apart from slave history. Indeed, we have seldom confronted that history ourselves; that is why I contend that the acceptance of the past will be the beginning of our liberation. Dignity is not bestowed, and it cannot be taken, it can and must be accepted. But the acceptance is a matter of consciousness and the consciousness is the result of experience and conviction. (Asante, 1980 p. 35)

Asante is referring to change. Institutional change, group change, personal change. Change is an evolutionary process, socialization is an evolutionary process. Socialization based upon culture and change is the foundation for Black child advocacy activities and socialization processes. Satterwhite (1971) discusses the role of independent Black institutions in affecting change in the development of Black children and indicates that these institutions are a necessary element in the community to fulfill these objectives.

> Black people must know who they are and what they are (identity); know what to do and why to do it (purpose); know where to go and how to get there (direction). Thus an independent Black institution must develop an educational program which directs and channels through patterns...

It is being asserted that such programs must serve a functional role for Black people. Consequently, its objectives should eminate from the realities of the life and death struggle of Black people. Further, the objectives should reflect the fundamental concept of nation building which essentially are:

a. to fulfill the needs of African people,

b. to halt the process of cultural, physical, economical, political and social genocide,

c. to teach our history and culture , to develop an awareness of our contemporary environmental context, and to train for nation-building,

d. to create a new type of individual capable of building new social institutions,

e. to create an African personality embodied in a New African Man. (cited in Coleman, 1977, p. 23)

The development of the whole child is dependent upon several variables simultaneously. The psychological, intellectual, social, emontional, physical aspects of Black children being brought into consonance in the context of culture. The socialization process must incorporate strategies that enhance the child's total development, preparing the child to function efficiently and securely in the environment.

Culture as a Socialization Tool in Black Child Development

Erny (1968) envisions the socialization process in Black child development as that which is determined by the culture and the society that prodcues the child. He indicates that for Black children to be appropriately influenced, it is advisable to incorporate the knowledge and understanding of what childhood means in the context of African thought. Translation is necessary, because we are concerned with the Black (African) child in America, whose reality is being shaped by America. Some foundation has to be laid by the agents of socialization (parents, significant others) that will take into consideration the physical place of the child (America) and the cultural history of the child (Africa).

> Each society has its own way of seeing the child, of treating him, of envisioning what pertains to his education and social integration. What is readily accepted by one people may be inconceivable to another. But as long as we remain wrapped up within our own culture, its ways are so obvious and habitual to us that we are no longer aware of their impact; we live them more than we think of them. When we change our social, cultural, or historical milieu, we realize that attitudes toward the child also change. The same is true when a whole civilization evolves rapidly enough for us to become aware of its evolution. Comparison between what is done here and what is done elsewhere, between what is being done now and what was done before help to make conscious what was formerly accepted without reflection. (Erny, 1968, p. 1)

The socialization of Black children is based upon past values, beliefs, and strategies that are handed from one generation to another. Erny suggests that they must be recognized, analyzed and

verbalized in the context of culture. Culture becomes the frame of reference for the transmission of values, the clarification of values, the reinforcement of values. In order for the process of values clarification to occur, those engaged in socializing Black children will have to take into consideration what Karenga (1980) identifies as the cultural crisis in Black life. This cultural crisis is embodied in the duality of the Black child's existence; the Black child in the cultural environment, and the Black child in the non-cultural environment. Each environment influencing the child, and in many ways causing confusion of direction because of the lack of value consistency in the cultural reality. Through a clarification process, however, the Black child and those influencing the Black child can begin to grow into the appropriate self.

A paradigm that offers values analysis and clarification is that of the Kawaida social theory, which defines culture as the broadest aspect of a people. The conceptual frame of reference of Kawaida can provide the functional context of Black child socializers and advocates.

1. the key crisis in Black life is the cultural crisis, i.e. the crisis in views and values. The vision crisis is defined by a deficient and ineffective grasp of self, society and the world, and the value crisis by incorrect and self-limiting categories of commitment, and priorities which in turn limit our possibilities;
2. any real analysis of the Afro-American situation has to be Afro-centric. That is to say, it has to rise from and be on behalf of the new African, Afro-American;s
3. any real theory of social change must begin with a re-definition of reality in our own image and interests;
4. any real solution must draw its component parts from the best of nationalist, Pan-Africanist and socialist thought; and

5. any real solution to the cultural crisis must involve both critiques and correctives in the seven basic areas of culture...
   a. Mythology
   b. History
   c. Social Organization
   d. Economic Organization
   e. Political Organization
   f. Creative Motif
   g. Ethos

   (Karenga, 1980, p. 17)

Conclusion

Socializing the Black child to cope in the 1980's (and in the years beyond) presents a critical challenge to those affecting the Black child's reality. Socialization for self-reliance in an often hostile environment is critical for the effective development and survival of Black children. Strategies of socialization should be reality based incorporating the philosophy of Afrocentricity, the Kawaida Theory and education for self-reliance, with advocacy and change agentry the behavior modes of the socialization agents.

This author, after reviewing the literature in child development, family studies, sociology, and psychology, regarding human growth and development wishes to emphasize the importance of the expansion of information sources used to include all the culturally specific resources available that accurately reflect the Black experience in an interdisciplinary context. Those who intend to assist Black children in developing modalities appropriate to their reality will need to insure that the children and those significant to the children will have available to them the appropriate tools to assist them in successful environmental mastery. We all need to insure the future, which is the children. Those of us responsible for the well-being of Black children have the duty to incorporate into their existance, standards

of excellence, commitment and responsibility to themselves, their families and their people.

Black families did not just appear on the scene of America, they evolved through generations of pain and hope on the part of their forebears, and we now have the legacy of deflecting the destruction of the race.

> At all stages of their liberation, the oppressed must see themselves as (people) engaged in the ontological and historical vocation of becoming more fully human. Reflection and action become imperative when one does not erroneously attempt to dichotomize the content of humanity from its historical forms. (Friere, 1974, p. 53)

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